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ABSTRACT

Mississippi loses up to one-third of its potential high school graduates between grades 9 and 12. Developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for student recruitment are the first and most important steps in organizing an adult basic education program to serve the needs of these individuals. Recruitment requires trying as many methods as possible, including the following: high staff visibility, tours and open houses, student orientation, peer recruitment, and saturation of the community with public relations material. However, attrition rates are high, due to adult responsibilities and pressures. Adult basic education staff must provide the appropriate learning environment and flexibility of scheduling and offer counseling opportunities and role models to encourage students to remain in the program. (Contains 28 references and an appendix detailing years of formal schooling completed, by county.) (YLB)

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Recruitment and Retention of Adult Basic Education Students

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Adult Education in Mississippi

As Mississippi rapidly approaches the twenty-first century, she should be prepared to enter the most competitive business climate within the last fifty years. She should further be prepared to develop her most precious business asset--her workforce. As rapidly as technology and new economic opportunities develop and change, so too does the training necessary for the workforce to remain abreast of these innovations. To ignore or to remain steadfast in the belief that education and learning cease at the tender age of 18 is ludicrous. Eduard Lindeman, often referred to as the father of modern adult education, as early as 1926 espoused the philosophy that learning is not coterminous with completion of a high school education; instead, it is a lifelong process (The Meaning of Adult Education, 1926).

We are throwing away our most precious commodity--our workers--by denying them an opportunity to compete in the workforce merely because they lack the fundamental skills so vital to accessing the job market. If Mississippi is to grow and thrive and prosper, she cannot ignore her sacred obligation to educate her citizens--regardless of age, race, and sex--for every individual is an integral part of the whole, a micro Mississippi.

Statistics and Demographics for Mississippi

William Freund, chief economist emeritus, New York Stock Exchange, in a speech before the thirtieth annual Deposit Guaranty Symposium on January 13, 1993, in Jackson, Mississippi, made several predictions concerning the future of the economy. Among those predictions was the unlikelihood that President Clinton's campaign pledge of a middle-class tax break will become a reality. The post-recession recovery will produce economic growth in the three percent to four percent range; that is lower than the average six percent following every recession since World War II. He further stated that the United States can maintain a first-rate economy only so long as we have a first-rate education system. This position was buttressed by David M. Ratcliffe, CEO of the Gulfport-based Mississippi Power Company. Mr. Ratcliffe posited that "the most basic ingredient in any economy is educated, productive people." Ratcliffe further stated inequity in school district funding must be addressed because "you are not likely to find excellent schools in an impoverished community." A logical extension of this statement is that you are not likely to find excellent economic growth in an educationally impoverished state. According to Ratcliffe, school

districts spending more money per pupil have far greater graduation rates and fewer drop-outs, surveys show ("Economy Tied," 1993).

According to the 1990 edition of The Adult Education Program Annual Report compiled by the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC), Mississippi's entire allotment from both federal and state sources totaled $2.1 million, of which the state contributed $179,725 or 8.5%. This funding was utilized to serve 18,957 persons out of a total eligible population of 823,726. This represents less than 2.3% of the eligible population being served at a cost of $111.15 per pupil. To place this in perspective, the state of California services 19% of its eligible population at a cost of $212.25. The message sent to those people ill-fated enough not to have acquired literacy skills between the ages of 5 and 18 is that the timeframe for society's obligation to educate its populous is past, and they unfortunately have missed their window of opportunity. How do Mississippi and the other southeastern states compare to the example set by California?

STATE	ELIGIBLE POPULATION	COST PER ELIGIBLE POPULATION	POPULATION SERVED	COST PER POPULATION SERVED	FEDERAL ALLOTMENTS	STATE/ LOCAL ALLOTMENTS	TOTAL ALLOTMENTS
Alabama	1,259,800	$4.42	40,177 (3.2%)	$138.73	$2,802,200	$2,771,481	$5,573,681
California	5,359,094	$40.45	1,021,227 (19%)	$212.25	11,953,705	204,798,040	216,751,745
Florida	2,682,496	$20.89	419,429 (15.6%)	$133.62	5,873,650	50,171,357	56,045,007
Georgia	1,766,608	$3.63	69,580 (3.9%)	$92.27	3,818,874	2,601,314	6,420,188
Louisiana	1,290,389	$6.88	40,039 (3.0%)	$221.84	2,896,133	5,986,224	8,882,357
Mississippi	***823,726***	***$2.56***	***18,957 (2.3%)***	***$111.15***	***1,927,422***	***179,725***	***2,107,147***
South Carolina	1,047,480	$8.07	81,200 (7.8%)	$104.08	2,376,279	6,075,276	8,451,555
Tennessee	1,516,661	$2.49	41,721 (2.8%)	$90.56	3,317,472	460,853	3,778,325

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Drop-out Rates and Literacy

Mississippi loses up to one-third of its potential high school graduates between the ninth and twelfth grades, thereby forcing them into lives of poverty and underemployment. Nationally, 1991 statistics reveal a 12.5 percent drop-out rate among all races. In 1990-91, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Mississippi had 23,433 public high school graduates (refer to table in Appendix A). In 1991-92, they estimated 22,751 which shows a decline of 18.4 percent. This percentage may be even greater since "adult literacy efforts in the South are hamstrung by a lack of reliable data with which to establish goals or hold individual programs accountable for the progress--or lack of it--made by their adult students. Well constructed, in-depth literacy surveys have never been administered to measure the functional literacy of adults on a state-by-state basis . . . (Southern Regional Literacy Commission, 1990)" (Cosby, et al., 1991, p. 1.2). Traditionally literacy has been construed as "an essential aim of education in the modern world." However, it "is no autonomous, empty skill but depends upon literate culture. . . . Literacy requires the early and continued transmission of specific information" (Cosby, et al., 1991, p. 1.8).

As its primary focus, the federal adult education and literacy program is targeting those participants who a lack high school diploma or its equivalent. This has been selected as the criteria for achievement, since literacy is not a matter of simply being able to read.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (April 1992), 75.6 percent of the national population of 17-year-olds are high school graduates. As research and practice have suggested, "a high school credential serves not only as a benchmark in the educational process but as the vital link to lifelong learning" (p. 1). "There is no doubt that the less schooling people have, the more likely they are to be functionally illiterate. All the surveys agree on this point, even though they differ substantially in their assessments of the overall rate of illiteracy. The recent (1986) Bureau of the Census study, for example, found that fully seventy percent of those classified as illiterate had not completed high school" (Harman, 1987, p. 41). As high school completion is the main focus of the Adult Secondary Education (ASE) program, "dropouts" aged 16 or older who, according to the 1989 Bureau of Census statistics number more than 38 million, are the prime potential beneficiaries of lifelong learning (U.S. Dept. of Education, April 1992).

Public Assistance Demographics

Mississippians in households that receive public assistance function at appreciably lower levels of proficiency than those households which receive no public assistance. Of those households previously mentioned, 49,485 adults are eligible for money payment and Medicaid benefits under Aid to Families with Dependent Children according to the 1990 Mississippi Statistical Abstract. Not only was the state of Mississippi supporting those adults, but it also financed 127,349 children. In order to support this massive load upon the state of Mississippi, the total expenditure for public welfare from July 1, 1988, to June 30, 1989, cost the state $170,367,000.

It is interesting to note that according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in October 1990, approximately 63 percent of high school graduates not enrolled in college were employed; 20 percent were unemployed; and 17 percent were not in the labor force. Only 47 percent of dropouts were employed; 20 percent were unemployed; and 33 percent were not in the labor force. A demographic profile of Mississippians active in the work force shows 29 percent are involved in professional and technical areas; 26 percent are foreman/skilled; 21 percent are unskilled

workers; 17 percent of the labor force is in clerical/sales; and 7 percent in the labor force is listed as "other".

Definitions of Literacy Data

"Demographically, the state is not projected to change significantly through the year 2015. In 2015 Mississippi is expected to have one of the highest concentrations of people under the age of 19 of any state in the nation" (Woods & Poole, 1990, p. A12). Nationally, the highest level or greatest percentage of unemployment is all persons with eight years or less of education in the 16- to 19-year-old age bracket. In Mississippi, according to the 1990 census, 59.7 percent of persons 16 years of age and over will be in the labor force. What is to become of the remaining 40.3 percent of those individuals in this age bracket with neither employment skills nor with adequate literacy skills?

According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Young Adult Study, there are five levels of reading proficiency:

a. "Rudimentary (150)--readers who have acquired rudimentary reading skills and strategies can follow brief written directions . . . . Performance at this level suggests ability to carry out simple, discreet reading tasks.

b. Basic (200)--readers who have learned basic reading comprehension skills and strategies can locate and identify facts from simple informational paragraphs, stories, and news articles . . . . Performance at this level suggests the ability to understand specific or sequentially related information.

c. Intermediate (250)--readers with the ability to use intermediate skills and strategies can search for, locate, and organize the information they find in relatively lengthy passages and can recognize paraphrase of what they have read . . . . Performance at this level suggests the ability to search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations.

d. Adept (300)--readers with adept reading comprehension skills and strategies can understand complicated literacy and informational passages including materials about topics they study at school . . . . Performance at this level suggests the ability to find, understand, summarize, and explain relatively complicated information.

e. Advanced (350)--readers who use advanced reading skills and strategies can extend and restructure the ideas presented in

> specialized and complex texts. Examples include scientific materials, literary essays, historical documents, and materials similar to those found in professional and technical working environments . . . . Performance at this level suggests the ability to synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials" (Cosby, et al., 1991, p. 2.3).

"In the NAEP Young Adult Study, subjects were from Mississippi, Oregon, and a national sample of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) clients as well as persons using the Employment Service. This will enable Mississippi to compare its results with Oregon and those of the national JTPA survey. Since all of these surveys and the 1985 study of young adults use the same scale scoring system, it is possible for Mississippi to compare the relative performance of adults in the state with those of national studies past and future" (Cosby, et al., 1991, p. x).

According to the Mississippi Literacy Assessment (1991), 97.3 percent of whites responded correctly at the most basic 150 level; 80.5 percent of blacks successfully performed the same types of tasks. Tasks breaking the 150 level of proficiency include signing one's name on the social security card, locating the expiration date on a driver's license, and identifying the

correct time of a meeting from a form. At the 250 document level, tasks involve matching information on the basis of two features from documents containing several distractors or plausible answers.

NAEP (READING) SCALE SCORES	SURVEY AVERAGE (%)	MISSISSIPPI AVERAGE (%)
Advanced (350 and above)	20.9	7.3
Intermediate (250 and above)	84.1	65.1
Basic (200 and above)	96.8	90.8
Rudimentary (150 and above)	99.6	98.4

One such task involves locating in a table how soon an employee will be eligible for a particular type of fringe benefit. Another task at about this level involves locating a particular intersection on a street map. At the 250 level where respondents were asked to complete a check given information on a bill, there was a 38.8 percent greater success rate among whites (Cosby, et al., 1991).

"Adults with eight or fewer years of schooling scored considerably lower than those with more schooling. Individuals with 0-8 years of education scored an average of 81 points less on all three scales than high school graduates. Those who had some high school education also scored an average of 36 points lower than high school graduates. . . . There is a

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significant variation between the white and black population in Mississippi even when their educational attainment levels are similar. The white population scored consistently higher than the black population. White adults with eight or fewer years of schooling scored 54 points higher than blacks with the same educational level. This pattern continues at the other educational levels. In the categories of those with some high school, those with high school diplomas and those with some college, whites scored 32 to 39 points higher than blacks (Cosby, et al., 1991, pp. 4.8-4.10).

"By 2015, 38.8 percent of the population is expected to be Black, up from 35.6 percent in 1990, remaining the second highest percentage of any state" (Woods & Poole, p. A12). With the fall of the Berlin wall and the congressional commitment to downsizing the military, a substantial portion of these individuals will remain in the civilian sector with little possibility of employment.

Where is Mississippi Going?

In order to compete in the 21st century, Mississippi needs to look to her strengths. Traditionally, Mississippi has relied upon agriculture and, later, manufacturing to support her constituents. According to Woods & Poole, economic consultants retained for purposes of composing the 1991

State Profile, the Mississippi economy has a relatively strong manufacturing sector which provides the underpinning for stable job growth. Manufacturing employment in Mississippi increased by 63,000 jobs between 1970 and 1990. The diversity of the Mississippi manufacturing base is a large part of its strength. Mississippi manufacturing employment is forecast to increase by 57,000 jobs between 1990 and 2015. However, the "non-basic" sectors of the Mississippi economy are expected to generate the most employment growth over the next quarter century; these include jobs in finance, insurance, and real estate. Similarly, service employment is projected to rise a net gain of 21,800 service jobs statewide. Retail and wholesale trade sectors are also forecast to create 31,500 new jobs in the state by 2015. This shift in employment necessitates an increase in basic education skills as well as laying a platform for future growth and training in all areas.

According to Woods & Poole, 1991 State Profile, "The population of Mississippi is expected to grow slowly but steadily over the next 25 years. The total population of the state is projected to rise from 2.58 million in 1990 to 2.83 million in 2015. This growth reflects a population increase of 0.37 percent a year on the average, well below expected U.S. population growth of 0.89 percent a year." Therefore, it is in the best interests of the

state of Mississippi to provide a platform for this controlled population growth and limited economic expansion opportunity. This may be, by necessity, most readily addressed by an educated workforce. It is a matter of economic survival that dictates "the biggest bang for the buck." In other words, a well-trained workforce draws the attention of a variety of business and manufacturing interests.

It is imperative that Mississippi develop a curriculum for the education of those misplaced individuals who were unfortunate enough not to have received a public school education. Not only is this a moral imperative, but it is also an economic necessity. If Mississippi is to survive and prosper in the new century, the onus of responsibility lies not only with her professional education staff to develop the guidelines but also with her legislators to provide the funding so vital for the implementation of these guidelines.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDENTS

> Literacy and work force preparedness are two of the most important issues facing education today. Findings of nationwide studies show that reading and writing performance of students is inadequate. One of every eight current workers reads at the fourth-grade level or lower. The nation's economic future will be determined by the quality and competitiveness of the work force in a global context. Adult education has a critical role to play in helping thousands of people to participate fully in an increasingly complex and competitive world. For many, adult education is the critical link to economic self-sufficiency and the key to breaking the cycle of illiteracy (Brand, 1990, p. 2).

By placing adult education in such a vital position, the doors are being opened to recruit students. Many questions must be answered in this process of recruiting--how do we get students motivated to come forward, how do we maintain their interest in learning, how do we overcome barriers to learning, and how do we keep students in the learning environment, just to name a few. In order to be able to recruit students for our ABE programs, we must first be able to identify what motivates certain adults to

engage in learning activities. "To respond by saying that adults participate in ABE to improve their basic skills is both circular and uninformative" (Beder & Valentine, 1990, p. 78). It has been premised through most participation theory that adult education is an activity in which learners engage voluntarily in order to meet certain needs and goals. Critical to this theory is the underlying concept of motivation, "implicitly defined as the basic reasons which lead learners to participate" (Beder & Valentine, 1990, p. 79). There have been numerous studies conducted with regard to the identification of motivational factors, but it is important when relating to ABE students that we use studies which involve ABE participation. "A research-based understanding of the motivations of ABE students will provide information about how learners hope to benefit from literacy education and, through inference, how ABE programs can best help learners achieve those benefits" (Beder & Valentine, 1990, p. 80).

One study conducted in Iowa by Hal Beder, associate professor at Rutgers University, posited three reasons why adults who are eligible for ABE fail to participate: "They lack sufficient motivation to attend; they are motivated, but are in some way deterred; or they are simply unaware that ABE exists" (Beder, 1990, p. 207). Studies regarding motivational factors

have been numerous, with the work of Houle being primarily significant. Houle's typology of goal oriented, activity oriented, or learning oriented types of motivation were expanded on by Boshier in 1971 with his factor analytic work identifying 14 motivations. Morstain and Smart, in 1974, reduced Boshier's motivations to six in their factor solution while more recently, Kotler (1975) and Beder (1986) have applied the concept of demand to motivation, seeing it more as a continuum.

In 1987, Beder and Valentine conducted a study which focused directly on motivation in ABE and found there to be "ten basic motivations for participation among Iowa ABE students: Self-Improvement, Family Responsibility, Diversion, Literacy Development, Community/Church Involvement, Job Advancement, Launching, Economic Need, Educational Advancement, and the Urging of Others" (Beder, 1990b, p. 208). "Taken together these motivations represent the 'core product' for ABE--the basic utility or benefit learners seek to derive from participation" (Beder, 1990a, p. 1).

A study conducted in Iowa revealed that of 129 nonparticipants, five out of six responses related attitudes towards, and perceptions of adult basic

education as reasons behind nonparticipation (Thomas 1990). Sample statements ranged from:

I would feel strange going back to school.

There aren't many people in adult high school classes my age.

Going back to school would be like going to high school all over again.

I am too old to go back to school.

A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life.

Attitudes and perceptions of adults toward ABE are multidimensional. If there is a low perception of need, this translates into low motivation to attend. In economic terms, if there is no demand for ABE, efforts to recruit will be fraught with futility (Beder, 1990b).

Recruiting the Adult Learner

Developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for student recruitment are the first and most important steps in organizing a program, regardless of whether the design is for the general community or in-house clients. If a program does not reach its targeted population, no matter how good it is, it will fail (Schild, 1990).

"Reaching ABE students is a problem which has persisted since the advent of significant federal funding in 1966 although many strategies have been used in attempts to reach them including the mass media, referrals, recruiters, and co-sponsorship. Yet despite significant efforts, the problem persists to the extent that less than 5% of the eligible population is served in any given year" (Beder, 1990a, p. 1). As early as 1966, questions were being raised about recruitment and retention practices in adult basic education programs. With the soaring rates of illiteracy, the question naturally followed as to why so few functionally illiterate adults were enrolling in basic education programs, and why, once we managed to get them there, we encountered such profound retention problems (Ratcliff, 1983). "Certainly chronic underfunding of the ABE program and the close association between poor participation in adult education and low socio-economic status have constrained efforts to recruit, retain, and instruct ABE students" (Beder, 1990a, pp. 1-2). These factors, while significant, are very difficult to treat; and in order to improve success at recruiting ABE students, our focus must be that of concentration on the elements of the problem which are responsive to the solution (Beder, 1990a).

The ABE population is not a homogeneous group, but unfortunately the prevalent tendency today is to treat it as such. There are numerous subgroups or subpopulations within the identified ABE population; each differs from the other in important ways and should thus be approached with different strategies. ABE planners, therefore, have only two options available to them when planning programs: "They can either ignore reality and treat the population as if it were homogeneous or respond to the diversity by tailoring recruitment and instruction to specific subgroup needs, wants, and perceptions" (Beder, 1990a, p. 10). A plethora of marketing theory supports the second course of action, indicating that it will immensely improve efforts to reach the population. Since the whole concept is aimed at recruiting ABE students, we should use every method possible to ensure that we accomplish just that.

In a study examining the incentives and barriers to participation in ABE programs for one subpopulation--African-Americans in New York City--personal motivation was seen as the essential factor in contacting, enrolling, and persisting in ABE (D'Amico-Samuels, 1990). In deciding to enroll in ABE courses, many of these adults had already overcome substantial barriers. One of particular import was in effect the way ABE

programs were advertised or publicized. There was agreement among the consensus that the general image and language used in describing adults in need of basic education was offensive. This language feeds the fears and embarrassment and conveys mistaken notions of whom programs serve. "Language which describes people as upgrading or improving their reading and skills would more accurately reflect the abilities and self-perceptions of focus group participants." For many younger African-Americans "in need of basic education, some suggested a marketing approach that makes education 'as attractive as Reebok sneakers'" (D'Amico-Samuels, 1990, p. 15). D'Amico-Samuels stresses the importance of having information available on a basis which allows people to respond to it because circumstances which motivate adults to participate can occur at any time: "Advertising should be regularly scheduled rather than concentrated in campaign fashion" (1990, p. 16).

"The most powerful tool for recruitment in education is still word-of-mouth publicity generated by satisfied students" (Brod, 1990, p. 2). "On the question of what strategies seem to work best for recruiting ABE students, there is consensus that 'among undereducated adults, personal sources are more effective than non-personal [e.g., media] sources' (Bock, 1980)"

(Balmuth, 1988, p. 12). A study conducted in 1989 in New York City revealed that the majority of adults (42%) who attend literacy programs hear about the programs from family or friends (Schild, 1990).

Tips for Recruitment

There is no single best method that works in every situation every time. The act of recruiting requires trying as many methods as possible, always with the realization that they will work with varying degrees of effectiveness (Handbook for ABE, 1989).

1. Have the staff of your center become highly visible in the community, and encourage them to work closely with community groups (public agencies, volunteer groups, service organizations, churches, businesses and industries, and libraries).
2. Provide tours and open houses at the program site. Encourage students to bring a friend or acquaintance who could be a possible student.
3. Offer student orientation sessions to help clear up problems and calm the apprehensions that many students have (Ratcliff, 1983).
4. Avoid use of the word 'illiterate' and images of adult learners as totally deficient.

5. Design ads which are appealing and exciting by using rap music and images which attract the young.
6. Continue to publicize hotline and referral numbers, and utilize the African-American media to do so.
7. Saturate the city with ads, using the radio and television continuously.
8. Use a mobile Literacy Van approach and/or organize a Literacy Drive, working with a coalition of community groups.
9. Recruit through family, community, and organizational networks of current students.
10. Recruit people through door-to-door campaigns or on the streets of neighborhoods.
11. Use program participants and/or graduates to recruit others, either as paid head-hunters or as Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
12. Connect literacy information and services to public and private institutions:
    a. Put information in public places such as social service and unemployment offices, churches, public schools, voting booths, hospitals, and libraries.

b. Enlist city schools in recruitment, through PTAs or PTOs and contacts with dropouts and pregnant teens.

c. Have employers make announcements and provide release time to go to classes.

d. Connect classes to businesses and concrete job possibilities as incentives for participation (D'Amico-Samuels, 1990, pp. 11-13).

13. One of the most effective methods to create awareness of ABE is to saturate a community for one week with public relations material. This method is referred to as "blitz week" and, where this recruitment method has been used, it has been quite effective in reaching potential students. "Blitz week" includes the following:

FLIERS OR BROCHURES--These are provided to grocery stores to be placed in sacks on their busy days.

POSTERS--These can be placed in every possible storefront window or on bulletin boards in laundromats, gas stations, church vestibules, etc.

MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION--Pastors of all churches in the community are asked to include a message in their church bulletin or to distribute a brochure with their bulletin.

NEWSPAPER--Ask the editor to publicize the program, name of contact person, class times and location, and a success story, if possible, during that week.

RADIO AND TV--Utilize the calendar of events which many stations provide; take advantage of interview and call-in talk shows which are popular in small communities; ask for public service announcement (PSA) time.

ELECTRONIC SIGNS--Ask owners of the sign to put a catchy message on the sign for ABE during the week or use the community bulletin board.

PLACEMATS--Attractive placemats on pastel colored paper are distributed to cafes and bowling alleys, which have been contacted, for use during the week.

TENT CARDS--Some ABE supervisors have developed tent cards as an alternative for establishments not wishing to use placemats.

COCKTAIL NAPKINS--These are available for distribution to bars.

BOOKMARKS--The availability of this item varies, but quite often bookmarks can be obtained from Contact Literacy Inc. The logical distributions are via the local library.

RUMMAGE SALES--Recruiters ask those having rummage sales if they will post a poster and put out brochures.

COMMODITY DISTRIBUTION--Some programs have used a former student to pass out information on the ABE program to those standing in line to receive the free commodities.

YARD SIGNS--This is a public relations gimmick that each community has to decide on the value of using. *Use catchy phrases and very little wording!*

DOOR TO DOOR--This again is a method that every community has to make a decision on use. Some people are turned off by door to door contacts.

OTHER--In some communities, the schools have included a flier or articles on the ABE program in their newsletter which is sent to all school patrons (Bockbrader, 1989, pp. 14-15).

Having recruited students to ABE, now comes the difficult task of maintaining their enrollment on a consistent basis so as to guarantee completion of a prescribed program. "High rates of absenteeism and dropout plague ABE programs everywhere" (Balmuth, 1988, p. 13). Based on a review of current literature, the following outlines what is occurring today in ABE in order to maintain enrollment.

Retention of Learners

The focus of most adult basic education programs seems to have shifted from the recruitment of potential students to the retention of students. At the 1992 Joint ABE/GED Annual National Administrator's Conference, when administrators were posed the question, "What is *the* number one program issue in literacy education today?" the response overwhelmingly referenced the high rates of student attrition.

Attrition rates are very high, ranging from 60 to 70 percent in some state programs. "Adult literacy and adult secondary education programs experience attrition rates averaging four times the rate of attrition experienced by other adult education programs" (Martin, 1990, p. 159). Why does this persist if teachers are dedicated to the cause, if programs are learner-centered, and if materials are as adult-sensitive as possible?

It is very easy for an adult to drop out of school--he/she is not forced to be there; no law coerces his/her attendance. Chances are he/she has no money invested in the program--only time. So, if the class is boring or is not meeting his/her needs and/or expectations, why not leave?

Reasons for dropout behavior are numerous and complex, and findings produced in over a hundred studies in the last several decades have revealed inconclusive, contradictory evidence (Martin, 1990). In a study conducted involving two major ABE centers in Pittsburgh, it was found that a part of the solution lies in the first three weeks of classes. The study also pointed out that student perceptions of past "schooling" served as a major influence on the outcome of whether the student remained or dropped out (Quigley, 1992). If, indeed, past experience in the classroom plays a predominant role in the retention game, does this put the decision to quit beyond the influence of ABE/GED personnel? Not necessarily, according to Allan Quigley, assistant professor and director of adult education at Pennyslvania State University, The Center for Continuing and Graduate Education at Monroeville, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The staff may not be able to control any of the students' situational problems, but attrition is not an inevitable occurrence since it is possible to work with, and change, attitudes

(Quigley, 1992). To be able to change students' attitudes, one must first understand how these attitudes were formed years ago in the early schooling experiences of "at risk" ABE students.

In two studies conducted by Quigley in 1987 and 1989, students exhibited a positive attitude toward the value of education, but they simultaneously possessed negative, hostile, or traumatic feelings toward past school. In fact, education and school--often used interchangeably among educators--apparently mean different things to many ABE dropouts. Beder, during a study in Iowa in 1989, sought to determine what prompted nonparticipants in their decision not to return to ABE programs. He found that dislike for school accounted for the greatest amount of variance (Quigley, 1992). In the 1989 study, Quigley and others sought to ascertain whether some students automatically entered ABE programs with poor attitudes possibly carried over from past school experience. They further sought to determine if these students could be identified and thereby encouraged to stay (Quigley, 1992). A total of 37 students were interviewed in-depth and defined as being either Reluctant Learners (RLs), those who dropped out in the first three weeks; or Persisters (Ps), those who stayed for over six months. The mean school grade previously attained was 8.7 for Ps

and 9.4 for RLs. The mean for years out of school was 25 years for Ps and 12.4 years for RLs. The results of this study were surprising in that they revealed that Reluctant Learners were slightly more comfortable in school than were the Persisters and they felt a slightly higher sense of significance in school. It was also revealed that a larger number of younger students dropped out of ABE in the first three weeks than did older students. Both groups appeared to like their teachers, but Reluctant Learners clearly felt that their teachers gave them inadequate attention (Quigley, 1992).

In studying the focus group for African-American perspectives on guidelines for recruitment and retention, D'Amico-Samuels (1990) discovered several characteristics that encouraged learners to stay in a program: "program support services, the location, timing and composition of classes, the content of material utilized and the quality of instruction were all cited as having an effect on a program's ability to retain students" (p. 19). The study also demonstrated that students' expectations regarding their own progress and outcomes weighed heavily as a factor in whether or not they remained in the program. It was also discovered that those programs having an on-site counselor seemed to have a higher retention rate than others. Counselors were seen as enhancing students' ability and desire to remain in

the program. Students spoke positively about counselors' encouragement and support of them while enrolled in the programs. Just as vital to retention of students is the presence of caring, respectful and patient instructors. Instructors must have a grasp of the situation of adult learners, both educationally and contextually.

Another study conducted in 1989 at the University of Pittsburgh to analyze attrition in urban basic literacy programs and devise strategies to increase retention concluded that findings were consistent with other studies that have evidenced that both program and personal factors affect an individual's decision to continue in a literacy program. Two major factors which contribute to attrition relate to the effectiveness of the tutor and tutor attrition, and self-image and feelings of success and achievement (Bean, et al., 1989). When participants were asked what things could have kept them in the program, the responses related to the need to be working on a self-designed goal or material, a finding consistent with studies relating to how adults learn. The findings of the Bean, et al., study "suggest a need for literacy programs to provide training for their tutors to help them develop appropriate strategies to address the special educational, social and emotional needs of adults who have not been successful in school" (1989, p. 13).

"Considering the amount of effort dedicated to student recruitment, it is ironic and wasteful of hard-won resources for the attrition rate for literacy programs to remain so high" (p. 15).

There are four factors which serve as retention motivation for the adult literacy student: "(1) peer support; (2) perceived progress in developing literacy skills; (3) heightened self-esteem; and (4) a good teacher" (Brod, 1990, p. 3).

How successful an ABE program will be is influenced by the key factors of recruitment of students and the assurance that they complete the specified program of study (Hughes, et al., 1988). Often when students enroll in ABE programs, they are unaware of the work and effort required to meet their goals. As reality begins to set in, together with family, social or health problems, many students' attendance suffers. These students need to be reminded that they are missed and reassured that they are making progress. The students' self-esteem will improve as will their confidence in their ability to learn (Bockbrader, 1989). There is a frequently encountered pattern of high student dropout at certain intervals: right after the first week because students experience panic that they could possibly fail, and at three and nine months because they have been reassured that they, indeed, are not

stupid or perhaps they feel they are no longer making any progress toward learning and thus their motivation is reduced (Balmuth, 1988). This is the point where it is important to offer counseling to maintain contact with students and to eradicate any negative feelings or frustrations and to reinforce self-esteem.

Some important points to remember for the first class meeting when working to retain students in the learning environment are:

a. Send students home from the first class meeting with a skill which they can use--no matter how small or simple it may seem.

b. Arouse their interest in future classes by telling them briefly about activities planned for future sessions--something they will surely not want to miss.

c. Give them action, not words! Too many teachers devote much, if not all, of the entire first class meeting to a long oration about the course (Handbook for Adult Basic Education, 1989).

Tips for Retention

In attempting to retain students in ABE classes, the ultimate challenge is to look to the adult learner for direction (Quigley, 1992). The following

list offers some ideas which were repeated throughout the literature in varying forms on ways of keeping the adult learner in the classroom:

1. Consider setting up all male classes to encourage African-American men to come to programs.
2. Locate classes in the community, in housing projects, for example, as one of a number of program site choices.
3. Increase the number of classes and the times at which they are offered.
4. Provide a strong, effective counseling component.
5. Provide job counseling and/or job training as part of a program.
6. Offer day care at program site.
7. Provide patient, caring instructors, peer tutors and student support groups.
8. Design class content which reflects student goals and interests, perhaps focusing on specific skills which connect work with study.
9. Make stipends available for attendance.

10. Attention should be directed to the family and community networks of individuals, both as sources of recruitment and as support for retention.

11. Drop-in classes, or at least more flexible scheduling, are important for both recruitment and retention.

12. Attention to support services, particularly counseling, day-care and job-related assistance, is crucial to recruitment (D'Amico-Samuels, 1990, pp. 23-24).

13. Have coffee breaks during class. This is a way of motivating adults who feel somewhat ashamed of their educational deficiencies, and it gives them an opportunity to visit with fellow students to find that there are others having the same problems, thus encouraging him/her to return to his/her studies with renewed enthusiasm and hope.

14. Continued failure is a killer of incentive so concentrate on giving the most withdrawn, bored, or dissatisfied students the opportunities to succeed in something, no matter how small, <u>every</u> class meeting. Every time a student performs a skill

successfully, or learns a fact he/she can use, he/she is less likely to drop out.

15. Have each student compete with himself/herself. A Student is motivated to achieve by improving his/her own records.

16. Provide a warm, friendly classroom atmosphere that is non-authoritarian. Do not dehumanize your students; become their friend.

17. Allow students to use educational materials only in the class-room for the first 3-4 sessions. After the fourth class, allow students to take a book home. Many times adults hear that ABE classes will distribute free books on the first night of class and they come only on that first night, take their free books, and you never see them again. By waiting until the fourth night, it will make students more inclined to return for class (Handbook for Adult Basic Education, 1989).

CONCLUSION

From a review of current literature, one can see that all ABE programs suffer from problems in both recruiting and retaining adult learners. Attracting a student to an ABE program does not insure that this individual

will complete it. Attrition rates are high and appear to show no reduction in number. It would seem that ABE programs will always be in the middle of the fray in relation to what is more important--education or family? Adults have many responsibilities and pressures and while it is true that both program and personal factors affect an individual's decision to remain in the learning environment, there are some areas that we as ABE staff have no impact on. Our job, then, is to provide the appropriate learning environment and offer counseling opportunities and positive role models so that we might encourage our students to remain in the program and hope that they do so. If we have done all that we can to accommodate students in terms of learning environment, flexibility of scheduling, etc., then it remains in the students' power to complete or not complete the program.

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APPENDIX A

YEARS OF FORMAL SCHOOL COMPLETED

1990 CENSUS					
		YEARS OF FORMAL SCHOOL COMPLETED			
COUNTY	POPULATION AGE 25 +	0–8 YEARS	9–11 YEARS	TOTAL < HIGH SCHOOL	PERCENT < HIGH SCHOOL
ADAMS	22,376	3,619	3,702	7,321	32.7
ALCORN	20,746	4,443	4,627	9,070	43.7
AMITE	8,224	1,766	1,762	3,528	42.9
ATTALA	11,741	2,431	3,270	5,701	48.6
BENTON	4,843	1,301	1,294	2,595	53.6
BOLIVAR	21,777	5,247	4,577	9,824	45.1
CALHOUN	9,453	1,913	2,551	4,464	47.2
CARROLL	5,775	1,332	1,324	2,656	50.0
CHICKASAW	10,861	2,073	3,038	5,111	47.1
CHOCTAW	5,558	1,020	1,337	2,357	42.4
CLAIBORNE	5,432	1,061	1,182	2,243	41.3
CLARKE	10,624	1,923	2,155	4,078	38.4
CLAY	12,282	2,059	2,808	4,867	39.6
COAHOMA	17,510	4,228	3,828	8,056	46.0
COPIAH	15,962	2,698	3,504	6,202	38.9
COVINGTON	9,687	1,813	2,494	4,307	44.5
DESOTO	41,533	4,556	7,387	11,943	28.8
FORREST	38,761	4,343	6,490	10,833	27.9
FRANKLIN	5,233	1,036	1,156	2,192	41.9
GEORGE	9,846	1,750	2,302	4,052	41.2
GREENE	6,137	1,055	1,252	2,307	38.0
GRENADA	13,252	2,685	3,075	5,760	43.5
HANCOCK	20,398	2,636	3,894	6,530	32.0
HARRISON	99,878	9,582	15,644	25,226	25.3
HINDS	153,310	14,236	23,736	37,972	24.8
HOLMES	11,623	2,982	3,057	6,039	52.0
HUMPHREYS	6,605	1,906	1,636	3,542	53.6
ISSAQUENA	1,099	338	281	619	56.3
ITAWAMBA	12,807	2,987	3,547	6,534	51.0
JACKSON	69,935	6,453	11,456	17,909	25.6
JASPER	10,292	1,748	2,366	4,114	40.0
JEFFERSON	4,729	1,160	1,063	2,223	47.0
JEFFERSON–DAVIS	8,267	1,505	2,016	3,521	42.6
JONES	39,024	5,717	8,217	13,934	35.7
KEMPER	6,182	1,276	1,426	2,702	43.7
LAFAYETTE	16,387	2,242	2,644	4,886	29.8
LAMAR	18,151	1,872	2,971	4,843	26.7

1990 CENSUS

COUNTY	POPULATION AGE 25 +	YEARS OF FORMAL SCHOOL COMPLETED			
		0–8 YEARS	9–11 YEARS	TOTAL < HIGH SCHOOL	PERCENT < HIGH SCHOOL
LAUDERDALE	46,312	5,406	8,618	14,024	30.3
LAWRENCE	7,564	1,328	1,556	2,884	38.1
LEAKE	11,543	2,319	2,953	5,272	45.7
LEE	40,775	5,277	7,837	13,114	32.2
LEFLORE	20,941	4,930	4,436	9,366	44.7
LINCOLN	19,095	2,767	4,295	7,062	37.0
LOWNES	34,439	4,359	6,326	10,685	34.4
MADISON	32,164	4,285	4,871	9,156	28.5
MARION	15,450	2,892	3,480	6,372	41.2
MARSHALL	17,629	3,968	4,539	8,507	48.3
MONROE	22,351	4,490	5,425	9,915	44.4
MONTGOMERY	7,718	1,452	1,898	3,350	43.4
NESHOBA	15,137	2,572	3,341	5,913	39.1
NEWTON	12,426	2,011	2,947	4,958	39.9
NOXUBEE	7,064	1,840	1,718	3,558	50.4
OKTIBBEHA	18,826	2,092	2,985	5,077	27.0
PANOLA	17,281	3,772	4,121	7,893	45.7
PEARL RIVER	23,589	2,978	4,486	7,464	31.6
PERRY	6,419	1,040	1,412	2,452	38.2
PIKE	22,164	3,806	4,922	8,728	39.4
PONTOTOC	13,954	2,471	3,469	5,940	42.6
PRENTISS	14,374	2,984	3,784	6,768	47.1
QUITMAN	5,948	1,738	1,503	3,241	54.5
RANKIN	55,365	5,569	8,911	14,480	26.2
SCOTT	14,444	2,784	3,992	6,776	46.9
SHARKEY	3,672	995	793	1,788	48.7
SIMPSON	14,782	2,676	3,536	6,212	42.0
SMITH	9,164	1,678	2,259	3,937	43.0
STONE	6,324	769	1,248	2,017	31.9
SUNFLOWER	18,299	4,762	4,532	9,294	50.8
TALLAHATCHIE	8,575	2,479	1,964	4,443	51.8
TATE	12,553	2,182	2,717	4,899	39.0
TIPPAH	12,156	2,678	2,864	5,542	45.6
TISHOMINGO	11,803	2,703	2,613	5,316	45.0
TUNICA	4,110	1,226	999	2,225	54.1
UNION	14,114	2,772	3,250	6,022	42.7
WALTHALL	8,466	1,669	2,140	3,809	45.0

1990 CENSUS					
		YEARS OF FORMAL SCHOOL COMPLETED			
COUNTY	POPULATION AGE 25 +	0–8 YEARS	9–11 YEARS	TOTAL < HIGH SCHOOL	PERCENT < HIGH SCHOOL
WARREN	29,311	3,999	5,483	9,482	32.3
WASHINGTON	37,954	7,613	8,031	15,644	41.2
WAYNE	11,588	2,136	2,951	5,087	43.9
WEBSTER	6,464	1,284	1,390	2,674	41.4
WILKINSON	5,811	1,734	1,272	3,006	51.7
WINSTON	11,937	1,849	3,039	4,888	40.9
YALOBUSHA	7,666	1,729	1,669	3,398	44.3
YAZOO	14,976	3,212	3,774	6,986	46.6
TOTALS:	1,538,997	240,267	309,418	549,685	35.7